DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 513 CS 509 704

AUTHOR Rozema, Hazel
TITLE Using Personal Narratives to Incorporate Diversity into the Basic Communication Course.
PUB DATE 1997-11-21
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (83rd, Chicago, IL, November 19-23, 1997).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Autobiographies; *Blacks; Cultural Differences; Diversity (Student); Higher Education; *Introductory Courses; *Personal Narratives; *Racial Bias; Racial Discrimination; *Speech Communication
IDENTIFIERS *African Americans; Historical Background

ABSTRACT

Arguing that first-person narratives can illustrate communication theories and concepts found throughout basic communication course texts and can serve as first-person examples of the effects of racism and stereotyping, this paper summarizes two "powerful and engaging" texts that illustrate the standpoint of African-Americans in the United States. It begins with a summary of "Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High" by Melba Pattillo Beals, which describes in detail the physical and mental abuse suffered by nine African-American high school students who integrated Little Rock's Central High School in 1957. It then discusses "Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black" by Gregory Howard Williams, currently Dean of the Ohio State University College of Law, who at the age of 10 learned that his father was of African-American descent. The paper concludes that students can gain a glimpse of the challenges faced by persons of other races and classes by being exposed to such autobiographies; the power of standpoint theory cannot be overlooked. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 416 513

USING PERSONAL NARRATIVES TO INCORPORATE DIVERSITY INTO THE BASIC COMMUNICATION COURSE

By Hazel Rozema, Ph.D.
Communication Program
U. of Illinois at Springfield
P.O. Box 19243
Springfield, Il 62794-9243

Phone: 217-786-7297
E-mail: rozema.hazel@uis.edu

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H. Rozema

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Presented at the National Communication Association Convention, November 21,1997 in Chicago, Il.

CS509704

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Integrating cultural diversity concepts into the basic interpersonal course is an important goal. Students need to be prepared for an increasingly diverse workforce and society. Some students protest that they are not planning on traveling the world, and they are tired of discussions of cultural diversity. They fail to recognize the increasing diversity of our nation, our corporations, and the inescapability of a global economy. Almost 33% of U.S. citizens under age 35 are members of minority groups; according to Census Bureau estimates, by 2025, almost half of all students in the U.S. will be minorities (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 1996). Yet, many students refuse to see issues of diversity as salient. White middle class students often fail to recognize that they are beneficiaries of what Peggy MacIntosh terms, "an invisible knapsack of privilege," (MacIntosh, 1992, pp.92-93). They fail to recognize any special privileges their race and class confer on them, while minorities can see all too clearly the privileges they are denied. Here's a small sample of the items MacIntosh (1992) includes in the "invisible knapsack of white privilege."

-I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
-If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
-I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives.
-I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented.
-Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance that I am financially reliable.
-I can swear, or dress in secondhand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
-I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
-I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group. (pp. 73-74)

Reading a textbook on diversity or facilitating a classroom discussion is frequently not a sufficiently compelling means of enabling majority students to effectively engage in perspective-taking. Living life as a minority and experiencing discrimination often remains a hazy concept alien to their daily experiences. In this paper, I contend that using first person narratives can effectively serve a dual purpose: 1) the narratives can illustrate communication theories and concepts found throughout the basic course text; and 2) the narratives can serve as first person examples of the effects of racism, stereotyping, and discrimination, while documenting the powerful impact of standpoint theory on an individual's perceptions and self-concept.

Fisher (1987) believes that most communication can be seen as a narrative. He also contends that narratives (stories) can be more persuasive than argumentative discourse. A story will be most effective in changing attitudes and actions if it demonstrates coherence (makes sense) and fidelity (rings true to the listener). Thus autobiographies of minorities may be more effective in teaching the realities of discrimination than a classroom lecture because they can appeal to reason, emotion, imagination, and values. As Littlejohn (1996) explains,

> ...narration more nearly captures the experience of the average person than does formal discourse, which is designed to appeal to a narrow range of specialized rationality....Finally, narration creates an identification among people and appeals to the public on an indirect, subconscious level. (p. 174)

Thus a narrative approach to discussing racism and cultural diversity can be a powerful way of allowing a student to engage in perspective taking by altering the student's standpoint when she or he gains entry to the minds and thoughts of the characters.

Standpoint theory "refers to your point of view as it is influenced by your social circumstances," (Wood, 1996, p. 81). Standpoint theory contends the way you see yourself and the world around you will be critically affected by your race, gender, and social class. People who occupy different positions in society will experience a significantly different perceptual angle or window on the world.

Two powerful and engaging texts that can be used to illustrate the standpoint of African-Americans in the United States are: Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High by Melba Pattillo Beals and: Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He was Black by Gregory Howard Williams. In Warriors Don't Cry, Melba Beals describes in excruciating detail the physical and mental abuse suffered by nine African-American high school students who integrated Little Rock's Central High School in 1957.

In Life on the Color Line, Gregory Williams, currently Dean of the Ohio State University College of Law describes a childhood that drastically changed at age 10. Prior to 1954, he lived an upper middle class existence in Virginia, believing that he was white and his father was of Italian descent. However, in 1954, his parents divorced and his mother reluctantly left Greg and his nine year old brother, Mike, with their father. His father increased his drinking, lost his business, and with no resources left, returned with the boys to Muncie, Indiana. On the bus trip to Muncie, the boys learned that their father was not Italian, but actually was of African-American descent. They would be living in a shack in "the black projects" of Muncie, not with their middle class, maternal, white grandparents as they had anticipated. In the remainder of the book, Greg

Williams details his incredulous 24 hour change in social class and race and describes how his self-concept was radically altered by this world shattering news.

Excerpts from these two autobiographies can be used to illustrate communication concepts in perception, self-concept formation, nonverbal communication, language, conflict, listening, and relational communication. Narratives can be used to supplement and illustrate concepts from almost any unit in an interpersonal or hybrid communication course including concepts such as: communication is a process, irreversibility, punctuation of sequences, content and relationship dimensions, nonverbal cues, confirmation, disconfirmation, the Johari Window, reflected appraisal, social comparison, supportive vs. defensive communication climates, selective perception, meanings are in people, approaches to conflict, stereotyping, racism, groupthink, perspective-taking, confusing facts and inferences, and reframing.

Finally, the narrative approach helps students understand the power of standpoint theory, the assumption that your perspective on society is dramatically influenced by your social position or window on the world. . Melba Beals illustrates standpoint theory when she describes her disagreement with radio announcers' descriptions of Little Rock in 1957 as a nice *progressive* Southern town, population 107,000 including 30,000 blacks. City officials declared blacks and whites worked "side by side," minorities earned good wages, and there hadn't been a KKK hanging in over 10 years. Melba saw things differently (selective perception) because she couldn't eat at the lunch counter in the dime store, could only sit in the balcony at movies, couldn't ride the merry-go-round or use the whites' only bathrooms. Our interpretations are based on our past experiences, values, and attitudes. Symbols have a range or latitude of meaning and the interpreted meanings are in people's heads, not in the words themselves as can be seen by opposing definitions of *progressive*.

When the nine black students are refused entrance to Central High, they attend classes at Philander Smith College, a black college in Little Rock. Since they have little control over the upheaval in their academic and personal lives, inclusion and affection become increasingly critical needs. They grow very close, discussing their hopes and fears, mourning the loss of old friendships, while cherishing "the growing ties to the eight," (Beals, 1994, p. 87). Melba describes her feelings after a September 15 press conference. She writes in her diary:

> Today is the first time in my life I felt equal to white people. I want more of that feeling. I'll do whatever I have to do to keep feeling equal all the time. (Beals, 1994, p. 90)

Her self-concept changed due to reflected appraisals. The white reporters had called her "miss," when no white person had ever done so. They cared about her thoughts and opinions. They looked her directly in the eye with admiration and made her feel equal to them. Gudykunst

and other intercultural theorists contend that self-esteem is culturally based. We have a sense of positive self-esteem when we think we have met our culture's criteria for being good or worthwhile people. Gaining respect and approval for her actions from the white reporters gave Melba the self-esteem she needed to continue the fight.

But the glow from the press conference is short-lived. When the National Guard escort Melba into school, the communication climate is overtly hostile. Students have written "nigger go home" on the restroom mirror. One student kicks her so hard in the shins that she fell down; a second kick landed on her stomach. Melba asks Danny, her national guard escort, why he didn't do something. He claims his orders are simply to keep her alive. "I'm not allowed to get into verbal or physical battles with these students," (Beals, 1994, p. 148). She heads to the office to report the incident, but the secretary refuses to accept her story unless she had a teacher as a witness (solders don't count). Melba declares it hurt her feelings as much to report the incident as to live through it. No one is willing to listen and the lack of support, disconfirmation, and negative feedback is more devastating than the actual physical attack.

Melba soon learns that she is in a double bind. If she doesn't report the attacks, they will continue. But if she does report them to a teacher or administrator who doesn't want to protect her, nothing will be done and the next set of attacks may be even worse. So she decides to ignore the harassment as much as possible. In this type of climate, a little confirmation makes a big difference. Near the end of September, Melba writes in her diary:

> A girl smiled at me today, another gave me directions, still another boy whispered the page I should turn to in our textbook. This is going to work. It will take a lot more patience and more strength from me, but it's going to work. (Beals. 1994, p. 161)

As the 101st National Guard soldiers are withdrawn, the persecution increases. The white students engage in groupthink as they shout insults in unison, spray ink on the black students, kick their shins, and daily walk on the back of Melba's heels until they bleed. In the bathroom, they toss flaming paper wads over the door onto her skin and clothing. She escapes their torture by tossing her books over the door and hitting them. Her positive self-talk comments "warriors survive" and her faith keep her going. One additional motivator is her relationship with her grandmother. When she thinks of giving up, she can't bear to go home defeated and face her grandmother. She is invested in earning positive appraisals from her grandmother.

Melba learns she, too, holds stereotypes. The Federal troops are replaced by members of the Arkansas National Guard, soldiers who look and act like big, dumb, rural boys. Melba is dismayed to realize the same troops Gov. Faubus ordered to keep them *out* of Central High are now the only persons there to help keep them *in* school. After an Arkansas soldier helps save

her from a beating, she realizes that not all members of the Arkansas National Guard are equally racist. At least one soldier had been kind and compassionate.

The difference between fact and inference can be seen in the Arkansas Gazette headline on December 3, 1957 which read "*9 Negroes Begin 12th Week at CHS with no Incid...*" Melba and the other eight students are astounded at this conclusion. Did the editors really believe this? Why didn't they send someone inside the school to see we were daily being kicked, inked, spat on and scalded with hot water in the showers? The editors may have called the school and inferred that since there were no formal written incident reports, all was fine. But Melba and the others knew that their situation was more dangerous each week.

The disconfirmation was the worst. Melba had a deep yearning for human contact. It was hard to have no one to talk with all day, no smiles or greetings. Sometimes white students would stand close and talk over and around me as though I was invisible. "I longed for someone to acknowledge that I was alive by saying something pleasant to me, and allowing me to say something back," (Beals, 1994, p. 208). Occasionally white students would smile, talk to us and befriend us, building up our trust just to watch the depth of our pain when they betrayed us.

Melba's grandmother teaches her the strategy of reframing. If they pelt you with raw eggs, tell them it's great for your hair. Change the rules and thank them for their attacks. When boys try to hold shut a door, Melba pulls harder to open it and thanks them for the upper arm exercise. The boys were very confused when they couldn't upset her.

Link, a white student, befriends Melba and warns her which route to take in the hallways to avoid trouble. He sometimes yells insults with the other boys, while later winking at her in hallway. She wants to trust Link, believing that he is truly her friend, but is skeptical because he hangs out with a racist group of boys. Melba fears he is guilty by association, due to similarity; since he faces intense peer pressure from his family and friends. She believes he is sincere, but sometimes she wonders if she should trust him; maybe he is just setting her up for a bigger disaster. Uncertainty remains an overarching problem throughout the school year and the typical strategies for uncertainty reduction don't work in this situation.

The attacks are not limited to Central High School. Melba Beals describes how long established rules and norms changed during the traumatic school year of 1957-58. Her family constantly received death threats, bomb threats and other warnings of midnight violence. This led her mother to say,

> "If somebody ever gets into our house late at night, you grab those clothes, go out the back door, and run as fast as you can down to Ninth Street."

"But Mama, why Ninth Street? You told me never to go to Ninth Street." It was the roughest area of Little Rock, where all the honky-tonks and sinful people gathered.

"Yes, but no white person would know you there. Those places stay open late at night and are filled with our people. They'll protect you." (Beals, 1994, p. 62)

This narrative example demonstrates Melba's amazement at the changing rules and lifting of previous restrictions. Melba was frightened; the threat of violence must be serious indeed, if her mother was encouraging her to break a long-held norm which said respectable people and teenage girls never should be seen on Ninth Street. It also illustrates a nonverbal strategy suggesting that whites would not have cognitively complex enough constructs to recognize or differentiate Melba from the other African-Americans on Ninth Street, despite the fact that her face had appeared on the front pages of newspapers and magazines.

Melba was getting used to being pushed down staircases, kicked, covered with raw eggs, squirted with ink, sprayed in the face with acid, and having her clothing set on fire. This was part of being a warrior and volunteering to test the new integration laws. What she did not expect, however, was rejection from her African-American childhood friends. This hurt more than any of the actions of the Central High School students. One Friday evening she was feeling lonely because none of her old friends were calling or issuing her invitations anymore. So she calls her friend Marsha.

The music and laughter in the background almost drowned out the sound of Marsha's voice as she answered the phone. Her voice was a little strange as she explained that several of our old friends were having dinner, and they were going to have a pajama party. I waited for her to invite me, to say she'd forgotten and I should come right over. Instead, she explained that they didn't want me there because they feared segregationists would attack or bomb their homes to get at me. (Beals, 1994, p. 78-79)

To Melba, this open rejection was devastating. She felt like she had lost all of her friends and that no one wanted to be around her anymore. She also was crushed at the lack of empathy or perspective-taking by her friends. As she says,

> Here I was willing to face mean men with hanging ropes, give up my junior year among friends, and all the parties and fun, to integrate - to make things better for everybody. But Marsha and the gang didn't see it that way. What I was doing wasn't important at all to them. Instead I was someone to avoid. (Beals, 1994, p. 79)

Melba may have been expecting too much to think that 16 year olds could look past their own egocentric needs, to see how much more she was risking to make societal changes for everyone. Or it could have been that the over-riding fear for their physical survival, a basic, first-order need on Maslow's hierarchy, took precedence over their willingness to continue their friendship with Melba.

At the end of the school year, Ernest Green is the first African-American to graduate from Central High School. As Melba concludes, "The newspapers said Ernie's diploma cost taxpayers half a million dollars. Of course, we knew it cost all of us much, much more than that. It cost us our innocence and a precious year of our teenage lives," (p. 305).

LIFE ON THE COLOR LINE by GREGORY WILLIAMS

In Life on the Color Line, when Greg Williams' father admits he is an African-American and not an Italian, Greg reacts with disbelief. It calls his entire self-concept into question.

> No! I answered, still refusing to believe. I'm not colored. I'm white! I look white! I've always been white! I go to "whites only" schools, "whites only" movie theatres, and "whites only" swimming pools. I had never heard anything crazier in my life! How could dad tell us such a mean lie? (Williams, 1995, pp. 33-34).

His entire world has changed. He knew through social comparison that it was clearly better to be white than black. He can't believe that his entire life has been a deception, based on a nonverbal ability to "pass" as white. His father goes on to warn Greg that he will be disconfirmed and rejected by both blacks and whites alike in Muncie, Indiana:

> "This is the Projects, boys" Dad explained. "Colored families live on this side of Madison and crackers on the other. Stay outta there. If the crackers learn you're colored, they'll beat the hell out of you. You gotta be careful here, too. Coloreds don't like half-breeds either."

> An electrical charge surged through my body. Never before had I thought of myself as a "half-breed." TV Westerns taught me half-breeds were the meanest people alive. They led wild bands of Indians on rampages, killed defenseless settlers and slaughtered innocent women and children. Nobody liked half-breeds - not the whites, not the Indians. A half-breed! (Williams, 1995, p. 38)

This excerpt from Williams' narrative shows polarization, the power of labels, connotative meanings, cultural stereotypes, and the effect of negative self-talk.

Before his parents' divorce, Greg used to visit his white maternal grandparents in Muncie, Indiana. He was given warm greetings, but always realized there was a hidden subtext, or a blind area to his Johari Window. He would enter a room with aunts, uncles, and older cousins to face an abrupt silence. He knew there was a secret, but hard as he tried he couldn't figure out what it was. Several years after the divorce and after the revelation of his African-American heritage, he discovered the family secret (his dad was African-American). His mother was the bright and shining star of the family. She was pushed by Grandmother to win all the awards in school and head to college. Grandma Cook was ashamed of her grade school education and wanted her daughter to earn a college degree to impress her educated in-laws. Greg's mom destroyed these dreams by getting pregnant, dropping out of school, and worst of all, marrying a colored man.

When Greg's dad told the boys they were colored, he explained the consequences. "Life is going to be different from now on. In Virginia you were white boys. In Indiana you're going to be colored boys. I want you to remember that you're the same today that you were yesterday. But people in Indiana will treat you differently," (Williams, 1995, p. 33). His dad was both right and wrong. They were going to be treated very differently, but with negative reflected appraisals affecting their self-concept, they would soon not be the same boys they had been. Having a new race and social class would definitely change them. His instructions also pointed out the rule-governed nature of society in the 1950s.

Living in the black projects in a shack with their grandmother without benefit of indoor plumbing was a rude adjustment for the boys. Miss Dora, a neighbor takes pity on Greg and invites him over for dinner. As he searches for a wash basin, she informs him there is a bathroom off the dining room. He is shocked at how quickly his values and behaviors have changed, not to mention his appearance. As he narrates,

> Walking into the bathroom, I felt like a fool. We had only been in Muncie six months, and I'd already forgotten normal people had sinks, bathtubs, and commodes, not outdoor privies and cold-water spigots....I was shocked by my image in the

mirror. My face was so thin and dirty I hardly recognized myself. The water turned scummy and gray as I scrubbed and scrubbed... (Williams, 1995, pp. 70-71)

Greg had become so acculturated into the roles, norms, and expectations for behavior in his grandmother's shanty, that he had already forgotten the patterns of middle-class behavior he had practiced for ten years in Virginia.

As a pre-teen, Greg is faced with conflicting messages from Miss Dora and his father. Miss Dora believed all forms of stealing were inevitably wrong. But his dad illustrates the concepts "meanings are in people" and words have a range of connotative meanings when Greg discovers his dad stealing from a garage sale. Greg confronts his dad:

"I...can't believe you, Dad. Stealing from a rummage sale! How low can you get? What if you'd gotten arrested?"

"...I'm not stealing. I'm liberating. This is redistribution of wealth in its most basic and fundamental form. If the white folks won't give it to you when you offer a fair and just price, then you have the right to take it. It's a simple transfer of wealth to oppressed people." (Williams, 1995, p. 102)

No matter what word or label Greg's dad used to explain his behavior, Miss Dora was firm, stealing was wrong and she would not tolerate it. Her perceptions of right and wrong were absolute and she wouldn't buy into any manipulation of meanings or rationalizations.

One day the boys return home from school to see their maternal Grandmother's car in front of their dilapidated house. She provides meager information about their mother, but refuses to give out their mother's address for fear their father would find out where she was living. Mike, (Greg's brother), pleads for her to tell momma we want her address. Grandmother Cook responds: "Don't tell me what to do! I don't carry messages for niggers! Now get out of the car. I'll see you when I got something to tell you," (Williams, 1995, p. 113). The boys react as those they had been physically attacked. Emotionally they are devastated and end up crying in Miss Dora's arms. This was their grandmother with whom they had spent many happy summers. How could she suddenly turn and called them "niggers?" The attribution was so unexpected and so cruel. Yes, Grandma didn't love them as much as some of her other grandchildren, but they never expected her to voice such open racism.

The boys place their remaining hopes on Grandpa Cook. After all, it was Grandpa Cook who had initially confronted Grandma when Greg was six years old and intoned in a quiet unyielding voice, "I don't care what Mary's [their mother] done. It's time to let her bring her babies home," (Williams, 1995, p. 114). The paralanguage said it all. Remembering how

Grandpa had reunited the family for four wonderful years, the boys now hope that he will cross the chasm from the white side of town to the black projects and save them. Greg learns from his aunt the sad truth that Grandpa Cook is dying of cancer. As Greg's hope dies, he realizes that his relationship with the Cook family relatives has reached the termination stage.

Greg notes that his dad and the teachers at school frequently compared him and his brother Mike (who had a darker complexion and in retrospect, was dyslexic). They polarized the gap between the brothers by called Greg "white" and Mike "a nigger," by proclaiming Greg, the smart student and Mike, the failure. Greg doesn't want to be white after being bitterly rejected by his white relatives. He also observed that his father's problems stemmed from his attempts to pass for white in Virginia. He believes that trying to pass for someone you're not creates inner turmoil. He doesn't want the grief. He doesn't want his public acceptance based on a charade, allowing the public to falsely infer that he is white. Rather, he wants his identity based on the genetic facts and believes that being black does not rule out future success. His role model is Walter White, a director of the NAACP who is only 5/32 Negro, but is perceived as "black" despite his blue eyes, blond hair, and white skin. Thus, Greg rejects the reflected appraisals and perceptions of his dad, teachers, and surrounding community. He defines his own path, identity, and goals. This is no small task for a young man to reject the daily feedback and scripting that others try to impose on him.

Meanwhile, Greg feels a lot of guilt over the negative self-fulfilling prophecy established for his brother, Mike. Their lives diverged sharply: Greg attended college and law school, while Mike went to jail. He is particularly disturbed by the positive reinforcement he gets from his dad, while Mike was consistently told he was a screw-up like Dad and would never amount to anything (Williams, 1995). The power of family scripts and self-fulfilling prophecies can be clearly seen in the lives of the two brothers. Nothing could shake the static evaluations of the father; he was convinced he knew the essence of his sons and refused to amend his views or process conflicting data.

In his senior year of high school (1962), Greg needs his father's help. Greg has chosen a different path from his dad's, but his dad is still an interdependent part of his family system. Greg is refused admission to a calculus class and needs his father to petition the principal. He finds his father drinking and gambling and tries to convince him to come home and sober up for the meeting in the morning. His father refuses and declares, "Look, you ain't my daddy. I'm yours. You don't tell me what to do and when to do it. I raised you. You didn't raise me," (Williams, 1995, p.255). But his father's friend intervenes and contradicts Buster (the dad).

> "Greg been a daddy to both you and Mike. I seen him carry your drunken black ass home more times than I can count on my fingers and toes. That boy done raised you, whether you like it or not." (Williams, 1995, p. 255)

Greg often faced a role reversal and engaged in parenting his father and helping to keep his dad out of trouble. Here, it takes an outsider to confront Buster with this feedback, when Buster is defensive and angry that his son is interfering with his evening's entertainment.

Greg met his future wife, Sara, while in high school. They date while attending Ball State University. Sara's parents receive an anonymous phone call in the middle of night stating their daughter was dating a "nigger." Her parents roused her from bed and demanded to see Greg's picture in the yearbook. Since Greg is very light-skinned, they look at the picture and are confused. Attempting to hide their relationship, Sara gives ambiguous answers to their queries. Sara's parents are using logical strategies for reducing uncertainty, but the strategies are not successful. Eventually, they discover that Greg has black relatives. Now, it is Greg who wants to meet with them and let them get to know him. They refuse and eventually cut off all financial support for Sara's college education. Sara moves into a rooming house and takes a second job, but the strains on the relationship become too great and they break up. In social exchange theory, the costs of the relationship now outweigh the benefits for Sara. About five years later, they revive their relationship and eventually marry.

When Greg is about to graduate from Ball State, Dr. Ferrill, a history professor encourages Greg to become a university professor saying, "You're putting together a fine record, and we need people with a rich background like yours in the university community," (Williams, 1995, p. 271). This was a significant reframing comment for Greg. No one had ever described his struggles and anguish in such positive terms before. Greg eventually graduates from law school and becomes the Dean of the Ohio State University College of Law.

The power of standpoint theory cannot be overlooked. Greg notes that his black grandmother and white grandmother lived within two miles of each other for most of their lives, yet died in the 1970's without ever having met one another. The barriers of race and class were so powerful that a small distance of two miles in actuality meant they lived a world apart with totally different values, perceptions, and communication styles. Greg believes that his life was painful and frustrating for a purpose:

> ...I am grateful to have been able to view the world from a place few men or women have stood. I realize now that I am bound to live out my life in the middle of our society and hope that I can be a bridge between races, shouldering the heavy burden that almost destroyed my youth. (Williams, 1995, p. 284)

We can attempt to sensitize our students to the issues of diversity and social justice. However, none of us knows what is it like to live life as a person of another race. Greg Williams had the unique opportunity and challenge to live portions of his life in two worlds, while never being totally a part of either world. By exposing students to one of the above-mentioned auto-biographies, they gain a glimpse of the challenges faced by persons of other races and classes. Assigning an autobiography along with an interpersonal textbook gives the class a common text which can be used to analyze and apply interpersonal theories/concepts. In most class discussions, case studies and/or journals, students attempt to demonstrate their understanding of interpersonal communication by applying theories to actual situations. In these discussions, we are often operating with limited and one-sided perceptions of the situation. Using these or other autobiographies develops empathy/understanding of diversity issues while providing a richer common text for students to analyze.

REFERENCES

Beals, M. P. (1994). *Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High*. NY: Washington Square Press.

Beebe, S. A., Beebe, S. J., & Redmond, M. (1996). *Interpersonal Communication: Relating to Others*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Fisher, W. (1987). *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Columbia: U. of South Carolina Press.

Littlejohn, S. (1996). *Theories of Human Communication*. 5th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

MacIntosh, P. (1992). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies. In M. Andersen & P. Collins (eds.), *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Williams, G. H. (1995). *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black*. NY: Dutton.

Wood, J. (1997). *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.